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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001516

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH ONE OF NEPAL'S MOST SENIOR DEMOCRATS:

AN UNLIKELY PRIME MINISTERIAL CANDIDATE

REF: A. KATHMANDU 1486

[B.](#) KATHMANDU 1507

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

Summary

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[¶](#)1. (C) On August 7, the Ambassador met with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, a founding father of Nepal's democracy, and Narayan Khadga, a former Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission, to discuss the internal dynamics of the Nepali Congress Party, Bhattarai's recent discussions with the King, and the prospects for Bhattarai serving as a consensus prime minister. While Bhattarai is in good physical condition for his age and an excellent commentator on Nepali politics, he did not look strong enough for the rigors of public office. End summary.

A Meeting with One of Nepal's Oldest Democrats

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[¶](#)2. (C) On August 7, the Ambassador met with long-time friend, former Prime Minister, and co-founder of the Nepali Congress Party, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. Accompanying Bhattarai was former Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission, Narayan Khadga. (Note: Both are members of the Nepali Congress (NC) Party and have sided with the faction headed by former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. End note.) Bhattarai was imprisoned from 1961 to 1971 for his democratic activism and now at age 79 lives in retirement on the outskirts of Kathmandu. Always outspoken and a hero of Nepal's democratic movement, he provided the Ambassador with his views on Nepal's acrimonious politics and recent press reports that Bhattarai may emerge as a consensus prime ministerial candidate.

Dialogue with the King

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[¶](#)3. (C) Three weeks ago, Bhattarai met with King Gyanendra to discuss with him the impasse between the political parties and the government. At the meeting, the King affirmed his commitment to democracy but admitted deep concern over the current political stalemate. Bhattarai told the King that whereas in the past Nepalese Kings could be firm, direct monarchical involvement in politics was no longer risk-free. Bhattarai warned the King that if he continues to ignore the parties, the parties may attack the Palace. In their discussion of the Maoists, Bhattarai reported the King to say that they must be suppressed. Bhattarai called the exchange frank, describing the King as a gentleman, who continues to deserve the respect of the Nepalese people.

Views on Party Rival Koirala

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[¶](#)4. (C) When the Ambassador pressed Bhattarai for his opinion on the NC's next steps, he stated that the King must return what was taken. (Note: On October 4, the King dismissed elected Prime Minister Deuba. End note.) Should the King call an election, the NC will participate, Bhattarai said he believes the King may enjoy the tensions among the parties and the split in the NC. Bhattarai does not foresee a reunion of the two NC factions, blaming NC General Secretary Girija Prasad Koirala for undermining party unity. Bhattarai describes Koirala as unreliable and dishonest, with little popular support. Bhattarai also reported that a representative from the Indian Embassy (likely Ambassador Shyam Saran) had visited him, at which time the Indian was very critical of Koirala and his unwillingness to join the current government. Bhattarai observed that Koirala's stand was a break from his past practice, which was to do whatever the Indians requested of him. Narayan Khadga took up where Bhattarai left off, calling Koirala a fool for his ridiculous public statements. Bhattarai offered that the best sacrifice Koirala could make for the party was to leave it.

A Consensus Prime Minister?

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[¶](#)5. (C) When the Ambassador asked Bhattarai about the press

reports naming him as a consensus prime minister; the aged and enfeebled gentleman chuckled and replied that he had no interest in the job. He went on to say, however, that if he was called, he might be able to galvanize party support and would work towards elections in a year or two.

Comment

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16. (C) Bhattarai and Khadga were engaging and very critical of their NC party rival, Koirala. Despite some optimism in the press that a "father of Nepal's democracy" could reemerge in Nepal's time of need, Bhattarai appeared too enfeebled to be anything more than a figurehead. He required reminders of conversations that took place a week ago and referred to his diary to recollect details. His physical condition did not look strong enough for the rigors of public office.

MALINOWSKI